

## NHACD UPDATE

### State Technical Committee Meeting

June 9, 2016

Since our last State Technical Meeting in January, our State Association has been busy engaging in new challenges, new initiatives, building more partnerships, and maintaining relationships.

In March, NHACD hosted the two-day 2016 New England Leadership Meeting in Portsmouth with about 38 attendees from the six New England states. The NELM is an annual meeting – dating back to 1966!---attended by conservation leaders of the 6 New England states, primarily leaders from the conservation districts and our primary partner, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The meeting is held in Portsmouth and the purpose is to come together to discuss natural resource concerns, possible remedies, and ways we can learn from each other and possibly work together to solve these challenges. Our primary concerns are water quality, soil health, and wildlife. Conservation districts – for those who are not familiar--- work with farmers, forestland owners and other private land owners to help them implement sound and sustainable conservation practices on their land by way of a locally-led, cost-share, voluntary approach, **as it has always been** since our legislative mandate in 1946.

At this meeting, guest speakers included Curt Spalding, Regional Administration of EPA, Region 1, who addressed increasing environmental challenges from the urban landscape; David Simmons and Tom Chapman of the US Fish & Wildlife, who presented the Rule for the Northern Long-Eared Bat; A. J. Dupere of the NH Division of Forests and Lands who educated us on urban and community forestry; Bill Peterson, Manager of the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge, on the new Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge Proposal; and Rose Arruda of the Mass Dept of Ag Resources, made a presentation on Addressing the Challenges of Urban Agriculture. We also had the pleasure of meeting and hearing an update from the new NE Regional Conservationist with NRCS, Gayle Barry.

These meetings provide the New England state leaders the opportunity to discuss items of common interest in a region that shares a similar climate, resource concerns, the same EPA region, and a town government orientation.

Reaching out beyond New England to a greater community, .....Rick Ellsmore and I attended the Washington D.C. Fly-In----another annual event hosted by the National Association of Conservation Districts---at which we spend the day ‘on the hill’ making visits to our Congressional delegates.....educating them on natural resource issues (at this time, stressing the need for Conservation

Technical Assistance appropriations), and informing them of our conservation activities back home. These visits enable us to maintain relationships with the legislative staff and let them know what is important to our districts and how they can help where action needs to be taken.

### **RCPP**

[The RCPP is a new program created by the 2014 Farm Bill and administered by NRCS. The RCPP promotes coordination and co-investments with NRCS and its partners to prioritize, enhance, and expand conservation assistance to ag producers and landowners in order to achieve their shared conservation priorities.]

The **LISW-RCPP** is a \$10 million landscape-scale initiative managed by the CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation, the state agency (like NH SCC) that coordinates the activities of the conservation districts in CT. The watershed comprises 6 states, including NH

NHACD is currently working on a proposal for the Soil Health component of the LISW-RCPP in our state. The primary resource concern to be addressed is hypoxia caused by excess nutrients, primarily nitrogen. Excess nutrients are also impacting drinking water supplies within the watershed. Secondary concerns include regulatory uncertainty for farmers, loss of forest habitat, and wetland and riparian buffer degradation from severe storms and changing precipitation cycles.

The aim, ultimately, is to reduce nitrogen loading to Long Island Sound from working lands, and improve overall soil health, biodiversity, and source water protection on farms by increasing the adoption of NRCS conservation practices. Technical assistance will be provided to eligible producers and will include the development of conservation plans, which will lead to implementation of practices such as nutrient management, cover crops, conservation crop rotation, residue management, no-till/strip-till, mulching, forage and biomass planting, prescribed grazing, and integrated pest management.

For NHACD and the districts, this project---ending in 2019---will present a capacity-building challenge. But it's a challenge we need to meet for our future viability within a more landscape-based model of delivering conservation.

**CIG PROPOSAL** - Another similar, but statewide, project we are hoping to undertake---if our CIG application is approved---is Promoting and Implementing No-till and Cover Crop Systems in NH. Reduced till/no-till farming is a new way of thinking for many of NH's producers. A few have adopted this system already and have seen favorable results. The idea for this project is to build on these results and offer these producers a chance to test an innovative piece of

equipment---a cover crop roller---to solve the concerns many have with effectively terminating their cover crops in the spring.

**Demo Projects** – Our conservation districts are participating in demonstration projects this year to promote soil health and educate ag producers and other landowners about a variety of conservation practices that might benefit their operation. Demo projects currently in progress include riparian and buffer projects, interseeding, keyline plowing, warm season grass planting, urban pollinator demos, cover crops, no-till seeding, and fish passages. These projects are undertaken in partnership with NRCS.

**Statewide MOU** – A “Statewide Memorandum of Understanding among the Participating Conservation Districts of New Hampshire” has recently been finalized and submitted to the districts for their signatures. The purpose of this MOU is to provide the foundation for a cooperative working relationship among the Parties to meet their common goals, initiatives, and management needs. Some of these initiatives include: the Beneficial Insect Initiative, the Soil Health and Water Quality Initiative, the Invasive Species Management Initiative, the Important Habitat Initiative, the Farming Connection Initiative, and more.

We believe that it will strengthen all districts to be able to draw on a wider pool of technical expertise and equipment than could be supported by any individual district alone.

**NH Envirothon** - Once again, the NHACD NH Envirothon was held in May---this year at the McLane Audubon Center---for high school students to compete on environmental challenges. Since 1991, NH Envirothon has inspired teens to make responsible environmental and natural resource decisions through real-world, hands-on educational experiences. Many students step away from the Envirothon experience excited about learning and motivated to pursue careers in environmental studies, environmental law, natural sciences, and natural resource management.

Every year, volunteer advisors coach teams with assistance from local conservation districts, forestry associations and participating natural resource agencies. Students are tested on their knowledge in five topic areas: aquatics, forestry, soils and land use, wildlife and current environmental issues. Through the program, students develop an understanding of effective teamwork, resource management and ecology. This year the “Current Issue Challenge was: “Invasive Species Impacts on New Hampshire.”

22 teams from 13 high schools competed and 1<sup>st</sup> place went to Moultonborough Academy. These kids will advance to the North American competition which will be held this year in Ontario Canada.

Finally, the NHACD Annual Meeting will be held October 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> at the Common Man in Claremont. Save the date!